

The Peace to Forgive
John 20:19-23

Do you remember your first traffic ticket? I was 17. I had my own car, an old Ford LTD boat. I was a good driver, and drove pretty much wherever I needed. Dad was given two tickets to a hockey game in Grand Rapids and offered them to my brother and me. We jumped at the opportunity. We got directions to the arena and set out for our first trip to the big city of Grand Rapids, ready to have the time of our life.

Our difficulty started when we got to Grand Rapids. Hockey is played in the winter, which meant that it was dark. We had directions, but we were driving in unfamiliar territory trying to read street signs, many of which were missing, while navigating heavier traffic than we were used to. I looked up to see a light turning red. I hit the brakes but slid into the intersection. I saw two blessings. The first was no traffic, so I quickly pulled through the intersection. The second was a squad car in the left-hand turn lane; once across the street I pulled over and waited. After the ticket ceremony, I did the only logical thing a teen can do – I asked for directions to the arena. I'm sure he gave us the long route but we finally arrived.

The game was pretty good – at least that's what my brother Ken said. I couldn't focus on the game; I was preoccupied with how to tell my dad. He had trusted me to drive safely and I had let him down. Peace is not a word I would use to describe my emotional state of mind.

I'm guessing it's not the word the disciples would have used either. Locked in a room, locked in their grief, locked in their guilt, peace was not their emotional state of mind. All of them had said they would stick by Jesus no matter what; Peter even said he would give up his life for Jesus. But when Jesus was arrested they all scattered like a bunch of frightened sheep. Grief, guilt, fear, confusion, despair, depression, anxiety ... these words describe the disciples,

not peace. They had let Jesus down; they had betrayed Jesus' trust. Into this bedlam of mind and emotion Jesus comes. **(Read text here.)**

The doors are locked, but Jesus is there among them anyway. And with him Jesus brings the key to their locked emotions of grief and shame. "Shalom." Not simply the peace of calm and quiet, but shalom. "May it be as it was always intended to be." After showing them his hands and feet and proving to them he was indeed flesh and blood alive, he says it again, "Shalom." With that declaration all the locked up emotions of grief, guilt, fear, confusion, despair, depression, and anxiety disappeared.

How? The only difference was that Jesus was in the room; but that is all the difference that is needed. It is the reason Jesus died and lives again. Jesus had said the purpose of his death was forgiveness. Jesus conquered sin and guilt so that we might be made right with God and now we are free. Jesus comes to be with his disciples so that they will experience true peace, a peace that only those who have accepted Jesus' death as their own can experience, a peace that comes by forgiveness, then Shalom – life as it was always intended to be – is possible.

I grasped a sense of Shalom with my dad regarding that ticket I received. One of the stipulations of that ticket was that I would appear with a parent before a traffic judge. I now understand that it could have been arranged in Ionia, where I lived; I didn't know that at the time. On the appointed day, Dad took precious time off work to accompany me to Grand Rapids. I, obviously, went with some fear; I wasn't sure what to expect from the judge. But I also went with peace, actually Shalom. You see, Dad insisted I drive. Dad's act of forgiveness gave me peace by restoring the trust I thought I had betrayed and lost. Between my dad and me, it was as if the circumstances that resulted in the ticket had never happened. Our relationship was restored.

Jesus' disciples had trust restored as well. Immediately upon granting them Shalom and enabling them to experience His forgiveness, Jesus restores his trust, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." In an act that may seem strange to us, Jesus breathes on each of them, in essence giving himself back to them. It is a reflection back to creation itself when God breathed into the human he had formed, giving life and the image of God. Grief and shame suck the life out a person; but forgiveness breathes it back in. Jesus restores their life, their worth, and their relationship with God and himself. Between Jesus and the disciples it was Shalom, as it was always to have been.

Where are you today? Are you locked in the emotions of grief and shame? Do you feel as if the life has been sucked out of you? God is here in our midst. Jesus wants you to know that he is alive and that because he is you can live. He is waiting to breathe life back into you if you will receive his forgiveness. Whatever you have done, whatever trust you have betrayed, whatever shameful thing you think is way beyond God's love ... isn't. It's time to breathe in the life God wants you to have. It's time to for it to be as it was always meant to be for you. The wonderful thing is that if you will receive God's forgiveness your relationship with God will be more than restored because God will look at you as if you had never sinned – the way it was always meant to be.

That, however, is not all. Just as Jesus came with the power of life and death and chose to breathe life back into those for whom guilt and shame had left lifeless, so too Jesus gives the power of life and death to his disciples and us. As those who now live in the Shalom of God, we are called to share that Shalom with others. It's an awesome responsibility. Jesus said, very clearly, "If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive anyone their

sins, they are not forgiven.” You have the power of life and of death. How you conduct yourself will mean life or death, heaven or hell, Shalom or no Shalom to another.

Is it easy? No. It will require a daily giving up of ourselves. Jesus said, “If any would come after me they must take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk.9:23). That means we give up the right to our lives, to our need to be right, to our righteous anger. That’s the hard part. I like the right to my life. I like to be right. And I like the privilege to my righteous anger. I’m guessing you do, too. But it takes giving up ourselves. Only then can we truly forgive. It will need to be a daily, hourly, even moment by moment decision. Our unwillingness to forgive others, including our brothers and sisters will have the life sucked out of them. And, by our forgiveness we will breathe into them the life God desires them to have. That is how others will know God’s love and forgiveness.

Some of you here today need the life-giving breath of God. Please know his forgiveness is here for you. Hear Jesus say, “Shalom” and feel the breath of God restore you to life. God wants you to experience how it was always meant to be between him and you.

Most, if not all, of us have some life to give others. You know who you are and you know who they are. It’s time to forgive. Only then can any of them or us experience the Shalom of God; only then can it be as it was always intended to be in their and our lives.